



STREATHAM
BAPTIST
CHURCH

Whistleblowing Policy

Policy Approved by: Church Leaders / Trustees: 13 June 2023

Communicated to Church Staff: by email (with response request)

Communicated to Activity Leaders (if applicable): by email (with response request)

Communicated to Church Members (if applicable): at Church Members Meeting

Review date: 13 June 2028 or earlier if church needs dictate

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Whistleblowing is one of the most effective ways of preventing and eliminating wrongdoing within SBC. This procedure is designed to encourage an open, transparent and safe culture where everyone feels able to speak up.
- 1.2 SBC recognises that raising a whistleblowing concern can be daunting. However, SBC encourages everyone to report concerns internally as soon as possible where they suspect wrongdoing. SBC will listen and take all concerns raised seriously.
- 1.3 The policy aims to provide guidance to all those at SBC, who may from time to time think that they need to raise in confidence certain issues relating to SBC. It also sets out the support and protection available to individuals when they do so.
- 1.4 This policy is separate from the grievance procedure. Individuals with complaints about their own personal circumstances should use the normal Grievance Procedure. For example, if the concern relates to issues with their employment contract or an allegation of bullying or harassment.
- 1.5 If individuals have concerns about malpractice within SBC they should use the procedure outlined in this policy.
- 1.6 If an individual is unsure about whether their concerns are best dealt with under the Whistleblowing Policy or the Grievance Procedure, they should speak to their line manager in the first instance or the SBC Leader - HR Lead for further advice.
- 1.7 This policy provides guidance to all employees, voluntary staff, activity leaders, volunteers and Church Leaders / Trustees working within SBC who feel that they need to raise serious concerns in relation to matters listed below and where SBC's normal procedures through the line management structure have either failed or are not suitable.
- 1.8 This policy does not form part of any individual employee's contract of employment with SBC.

2.0 Principles

- 2.1 In almost all cases, raising issues internally will be the most appropriate course of action. SBC expects everyone to make their best endeavours to raise concerns internally through the appropriate channels to allow SBC to address concerns as quickly as possible.
- 2.2 This policy does not introduce a general protection for whistleblowers which applies in all circumstances. It applies to everyone who follows the procedure laid down in this document in disclosing concerns.
- 2.3 By knowing about concerns at an early stage, SBC has a good chance of taking the necessary steps to safeguard the interests of the church and its staff, volunteers and members.
- 2.4 No one will be victimised for raising a matter under this procedure. Any victimisation of an individual for raising a disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.
- 2.5 If misconduct is discovered as a result of any investigation under this procedure SBC's disciplinary procedure will be used, in addition to any appropriate external measures if necessary.
- 2.6 Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.
- 2.7 An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is itself a disciplinary offence. If told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority the individual should not agree to remain silent. They should raise the matter within the terms of the procedures set out under Section 6 (Informal Procedure) and/or Section 7 (Formal Procedure) below.

3. What is Whistleblowing?

- 3.2 Whistleblowing is the disclosure of information which relates to suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. The complainant will make a "qualifying disclosure" where they have a reasonable belief that one of the following sets of circumstances is occurring, has occurred, or may occur within Streatham Baptist Church (SBC) and they reasonably believe that the disclosure is in the public interest:
 - that a criminal offence has been committed, is being committed or is likely to be committed;
 - that a person has failed, is failing or is likely to fail to comply with any legal obligation to which they are subject.
 - that a miscarriage of justice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur;
 - that the health and safety of any individual has been, is being, or is likely to be endangered and the matter has not been properly addressed through SBC's normal health and safety management procedures.
 - the work environment has been, is being or is likely to be damaged; or
 - that information tending to show any matter falling within any one of the preceding clauses has been, is being or is likely to be deliberately concealed.
- 3.2 Irrespective of any statutory protection from unfair dismissal or from suffering any other detriment as a result of raising concerns above, SBC undertakes not to subject any person to any detriment or victimisation as a result of raising these concerns or the additional concerns listed. Where it is alleged that a manager or another employee has subjected a complainant to detriment or victimisation, this will be investigated under Streatham Baptist Church's Disciplinary Procedure and if substantiated will normally be treated as gross misconduct.

3.3 Examples of concerns that could be raised under this policy include:

- Abuse of a child or vulnerable person;
- A child, parent, staff or volunteer has been put at risk of harm;
- Unsafe working practices that put people at risk of harm;
- Discrimination against anyone that interacts with SBC;
- A failure to comply with statutory obligations;
- The use of unsafe equipment;
- Falsification of financial records;
- Bribery and or corruption has or is about to take place;
- Covering up wrongdoing or malpractice;

This is not an exhaustive list.

4. Exceptions

4.1 This policy should not be used for complaints relating to personal circumstances, such as the way someone has been treated at work. In these cases the Grievance Procedure must be followed.

4.2 The protection afforded to employees and others as listed above will not exist, either as a statutory right or within the terms of this policy, if:

- the complaint is made maliciously.
- a complaint is pursued frivolously or for personal gain.
- the complaint concerns information which the complainant does not substantially believe to be true.
- disclosure is made to an outside body without first invoking the procedure set out below, unless there is a genuine concern that to pursue the procedure would be inappropriate, or previous attempts do so has failed. (Disclosures made to the complainant's legal adviser in the course of obtaining legal advice will be protected).
- there is an inappropriate breach of confidentiality by the complainant or their representative.

4.3 In such cases, SBC reserves the right to take such disciplinary action against the complainant as may be appropriate.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 Any person raising a concern under this procedure, and any representative of SBC responding to it, is required to respect the confidentiality of the concern and information shared strictly on a need to know basis.

5.2 This means only in extreme circumstances, where the complainant is of the view that there is an overriding public interest in relation to a concern that has not been, or will not be, properly addressed by SBC, may information be shared with an outside agency, in accordance with the formal procedure below.

6. Informal Procedure

- 6.1 If an individual has a concern within the terms of this Policy, they may, in the first instance, approach one of the following for confidential advice and support in taking the matter forward:
- Their line manager;
 - A member of the ministerial team;
 - The SBC Leader – HR Lead.
- 6.2 The objective of an individual being asked for such support should be:
- to help the complainant to take the most appropriate steps within the terms of this policy and procedure.
 - to handle the matter with sensitivity.
 - to allay any fears, they might have in relation to their own safety or position.
 - to also be aware of the rights of others involved, including the right to confidentiality, and the right to have their account heard if the matter is pursued under the formal procedure.

7. Formal Procedure

- 7.1 Immediately on becoming aware of a concern sufficiently serious to be covered by this policy (after seeking initial informal advice as above if required), the complainant should write to one of the nominated persons listed below or speak directly to them following this up with written confirmation. The complainant may, if they wish, be accompanied.
- 7.2 The nominated person receiving such a concern should address the matter with the highest priority and take appropriate action as soon as reasonably possible. In circumstances where it is apparent to the nominated person that the concern raised is continuing and staff or church members and attendees are at undue risk, the nominated person should take steps to ensure that any immediate risk is alleviated. These actions could be temporary whilst the concern is investigated.
- 7.3 **Nominated Persons:** The person to whom a concern should be addressed will normally be as set out below, but in the absence of a specified person, the complainant should take the concern to another person on the list.
- In most instances, the concern should be addressed to a member of the ministerial team preferably the Senior Minister.
 - If the concern is about the Senior Minister, the concern should be addressed to the SBC Leader – HR Lead.
 - If the concern relates to the Leadership Team as a whole, or in the event of a failure for the concern to be addressed by any of the above, the concern may be addressed to the Regional Team Leader at London Baptists.
- 7.4 It is the responsibility of the nominated person to take action as necessary. In the first instance they should seek advice on how to proceed from a relevant source e.g. the HR and Safeguarding Team Leader at Baptists Together before conducting any investigations. Once advice has been obtained initial investigations should commence.
- 7.5 SBC will keep the complainant informed of the progress of the investigation and its likely timescale. However, in informing a complainant of outcomes or progress, the confidentiality of others must be respected. If an individual is being accused of misconduct, then it will take time to investigate their account of the matter, Once investigations are complete, the complainant should be advised of the outcome in writing.
- 7.6 The nominated person must deal with the matter with sensitivity to all parties. The support needs of both the complainant and the subjects of any complaint should be considered fully and appropriate measures taken to address these.

7.7 If the complainant is not satisfied that appropriate action has been taken, they may approach the SBC Leader – HR Lead or, if the SBC Leader – HR Lead has already been involved, another member of the Leadership Team. The complainant should be advised of the outcome of that further referral.

8. External Disclosure

8.1 This policy provides an internal process for reporting, investigating and addressing any wrongdoing in SBC. In most cases, external disclosure should not be necessary. SBC strongly encourages the complainant to seek advice before reporting a concern externally. It will never, if ever, be appropriate to alert the media, advice should be taken from the Regional Team Leader at London Baptists or from the media team at Baptists Together on a prepared statement.

8.2 If the complainant is still not satisfied, or if they have genuine grounds to believe that it would be inappropriate or pointless to pursue the stages above, a qualifying disclosure may be made to one of the prescribed regulators set out in Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014 2014/2418, e.g.:

- The Charity Commissioners for England and Wales
- The Information Commissioner
- Health & Safety Executive
- Her Majesty’s Revenue & Customs (HMRC)
- Food Standards Agency

8.3 For guidance on making disclosure outside SBC through prescribed regulators, the complainant can contact Protect, at www.protect-advice.org.uk, telephone: 020 3117 2520. This is an independent charity offering confidential advice to anyone concerned about possible malpractice in their organisation.

8.4 Information arising from a whistleblowing complaint that subsequently leads to a disciplinary, grievance or other investigation will be dealt with in accordance with the arrangements set out in SBC’s normal procedures for handling such matters (for example disciplinary or grievance policies). Certain complaints may be dealt with through the police and or the courts.

9. Related procedures

9.1 When issues are raised under this policy, reference should be made to the related policies as outlined below. This is not an exhaustive list of policies that should be referenced and is provided as a guide only.

Nature of concern raised	Related policy
Safeguarding	Safeguarding
Discrimination	Dignity at Work Equality and Diversity
Financial Fraud	Finance
Health and safety	Health and Safety